

Written by Karl E. Moyer and shared with permission of the author.

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The Difficult Journey of the Meyer Family: “Germany” to Lebanon County PA

There must be a thousand remarkable stories of emigrating from the Palatinate to a new home in the New World. At Mr. Hartzell’s kind invitation, let me share mine.

We are not certain precisely where the Meyer family lived, save to say that it seems to have been somewhere east of Mannheim. Things were tough, not the least of them a brutally-cold winter of 1708-9. We resist telling stories here of that deadly event.

At some point, Heinrich Meyer (dates unknown), gathered up his family, boarded a boat a Mannheim for The Netherlands and then another to England, as one of many Palatine families hoping for a better life in the New World. The family’s hopes got better in the process of Heinrich indenturing himself to the British navy, to become one of a crew of men harvesting pitch and tar, important naval stores, from fir trees once examined along both shores of the Hudson River somewhat close to Saugerties NY, this to pay his and his family’s travel to the New World.

A number of ships arrived at the Port of New York in 1710, and after some delay in New York City, these indentured servants and their families boarded boats for their voyage up the Hudson and to live in two “camps,” East Camp and West Camp on those respective sides of the river. Each camp has several relatively small “communities, and Heinrich and his family lived on one such as part of the greater West Camp community.

Then a big “OOOOOPS” went up when they discovered that, contrary to the scouts who’d investigated the fir trees in an earlier year, the particular sort of such trees did not issue pitch and tar!!! Let’s save a lot of space and words here by summarizing that things did not go well for much of anyone, given this turn of events!! The details make for MOST interesting reading; see below.

One of the families in East Camp, that of Conrad Weiser, Sr., became important leaders for the fledging colony of Palatines, and under his leadership, some of the families of both East and West Camp followed his example and moved upstate to the valley of the Schoharie Creek, which flows north into the Mohawk River, which in turns flows east to the Hudson. Conrad Weiser, Jr., and his father agreed that the boy live with a Mohawk family in the Schoharie Valley and, in so doing during the winter of 1712 – 1713, learn the languages and customs of various Indian nations, esp. the Mohawk and Iroquois. This would become of enormous importance later on in Pennsylvania, including his contacts with William Penn in behalf of the German immigrants.

Relationships between the “German” immigrants and the Dutch land-owners in that entire part of New York State relatively near to Albany and Schenectady got so bad, that Conrad Weiser, Jr. and some accomplices made an exploratory trip to Pennsylvania: upstream on the

Schoharie Creek to its source; a challenging hike over the top of the mountain that separated Schoharie from the source of the Susquehanna River well north of Binghamton NY; then down the Susquehanna over numerous treacherous rapids, etc., esp. those near Selinsgrove PA, and finally “a sharp left turn” up the Swatara Creek, well south of present-day Harrisburg PA and close to Three Mile Island of infamous nuclear history.

Navigating the “Swatty,” as we “locals” know it affectionately, had its own challenges, given its shallow depth at many places, not to mention yet more shallow tributaries such as the Quittapahilla, which flows through the city of Lebanon PA. . The dividing point between the Susquehanna and Delaware River watersheds is perhaps 10- 15 miles east of Lebanon, and Weiser’s scouting trip surely meant of walking on Indian trails and through virgin forest.

Upon the scouting group’s return to Schoharie NY, numerous families determined to make the trip to William Penn’s colony, leading to two primary excursions, the second in 1735 and which included the Heinrich Meyer family. Assuming that they went “lock, stock, and barrel,” one wonders how they negotiated the terrain near Wilkes-Barre PA, the rapids near Selinsgrove, and ultimately the shallow water going upstream on the Swatara Creek and then one or another yet smaller creek!

However it happened, Heinrich Meyer settled at a spring about one mile west of the hamlet of Mühlbach (now Millbach) close to the eastern edge of (now) Lebanon County, which was erected in 1813 out of Dauphin County to the west and a small slice of Berks County to the east. He eventually took deed to a large farm, much of it to the west and toward Schaefferstown, Lebanon County, and which was divided in the 19th century among descendants of his. Most writers report the Palatines moving into the Tulpehocken area, which is in present-day Berks County, site of the Conrad Weiser homestead and burial site, but clearly not all of the immigrants from Schoharie went that far east, as Millbach is ten or twenty miles to the west of the Tulpehocken area.

The main part of the farm with the spring house, the farm house, and the main barn remained in the family well into the 19th century. Amazing, the attorney who does legal work for me and my family now lives on that farm, has taken great care for the buildings, especially the farm house, and is an exemplary steward of this historic property of one of the 1719 Palatines.

Heinrich had four sons: John, who remained on the homestead; Jacob, who moved to (now) Snyder County, west of the Susquehanna River and about an hour’s drive north of Harrisburg; and Christopher, a Revolutionary War soldier whose military service becomes the basis of many memberships in groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution. Christopher moved to a large farm in Annville (now South Annville) Township, Lebanon County, near the current village of Campbelltown (originally *Campbellstown*) at the western edge of Lebanon County. The family was staunchly German Reformed at Campbelltown, which church’s cemetery has been the burial place for all but one generation of his descendants in a straight genealogical line to myself.

The *Meyer* name remains in this family among those who moved from Campbelltown to (now) Centre County PA, site of Penn State University. However, the Lebanon County Meyer people changed to a *Moyer* variant of the original name, as was also the case with Mennonite Meyer people who settled in Montgomery County PA and from whom arose the major-league pitcher Jamie Moyer. That family is not related to us in any way and were staunch Mennonites, especially at the Franconia Mennonite Meeting House between Souderton and Sellersville, Montgomery County PA.

Most of this family were farmers until mid-20th-century cultural shifts that found many of us leaving the farm. My older brother and I are fifth-generation descendants of Christopher Meyer of Annville Township near Campbelltown and seventh-generation members of this family to live in the New World -- but the first to move off from our own family farm for vocations otherwise. Our family exemplifies the great American dream: my brother and I were the first in our immediate family to go to college and eventually to earn doctor's degrees: Sam in genetics, I in Organ Performance and Church Music, and both to become college professors.

Finally: within the next year I shall address the problem of Christopher Meyer's sandstone grave marker becoming totally illegible. Sandstone was common material for buildings and grave markers in the Pennsylvania Dutch part of the Keystone State for many years, and more than not, such cemetery markers have suffered the effects of bad climate in ways that old slate grave markers do not, at least in this part of the country.

Karl E. Moyer

Two Postscripts:

1. Three significant books about the Palatine emigration to New York and their tumultuous lives as indentured servants in the failed pitch-and-tar project at East Camp and West Camp:

Cobb, Sanford H., *The Story of the Palatines: An Episode in Colonial History*. 1897: Cobb, a pastor of the "High-Dutch" churches in Schoharie and Saugerties, made a valiant effort to record the history of the Palatines from the Old World even to Pennsylvania. Not surprising, he misses various kinds of details, and his manner of English usage is at least "interesting," if not on some occasions difficult. He deserves our respect and gratitude despite some failings in the book, and I would recommend it, even as the first book to read on this subject.

Knittle, Walter Allen, Ph.D., *Early Eighteenth Century Palatine Emigration: A British Government Redemptioner Project to Manufacture Naval Stores*. 1937. One can sense this as a far-more academically responsible account of the story of the Palatines to the New World. Knittle includes ship lists which, while they do not answer all questions, become more informative than Cobb's account.

Otterness, Philip, *Becoming German: the 1709 Palatine Migration to New York*. Cornell University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-8014-4246-X (cloth binding)

The Cobb and Knittle books are available from the old Stone Fort Museum in Schoharie NY: www.theoldstonefort.org.

2. How propitious to have the article by Lutheran pastor David Jay Webber, "The skipack Palatines" in the recent issue of *The Palatine Immigrant*, a professional genealogist as well as an ordained pastor, he introduced his article with a terse but excellent discussion of the Palatines who came to East Camp and West Camp as discussed above and the various places to which they dispersed when that ill-fated attempt a pitch and tar utterly failed. His summary is worth one's careful study.